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THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

A PROFESSIONAL READING COURSE ON THE EDUCATIONAL WORK OF THE CHURCH. V

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There will be a great advantage to the religious educator in coming into sympathy with the forward movements projected by leaders in the field of general education. We select for consideration two writings of Professor John Dewey, whose conception of education as a social process has had so marked an effect upon the educational world; also a book upon the kindergarten, for the attitude of that system of education is fundamental to a large realization of the problems in which we are interested; and also Dr. Montessori's presentation of her unique method, which contains so much of suggestion for the development of child life.

In a study which the writer has been carrying on for some years into the moral and religious influences that have been determining in the lives of theological students, it has been remarkable how small a place the day school and the Sunday school seem to have had. Individual teachers, of course, have been potent influences, but the schools as such have done little. Dewey's *Moral Principles in Education* indicates very clearly the reason for this inefficiency. The school is largely divorced from life. The child often says, "What good will this

lesson ever do me?" and there is no adequate answer to his question. A prominent Sunday school recently presented an examination to its students in which several bright youngsters secured perfect grades and were duly heralded in the newspapers, but it is difficult to see that the ability to answer that series of questions on the Bible text would have the slightest influence in making the person a better member of society. And the remedy is not an insertion of specific moral instruction in the day school, nor an attempt to secure permission to read the Bible there, nor the tacking-on of moral teachings to the Sunday-school lesson. Morality is understandable only in relation to social life. Day and church school must relate themselves to the actual life that the people live in order to be morally significant. It is to be feared that Dewey's illustration of the swimming-school that attempted to teach people to swim without going into the water is all too illustrative of much of our educational endeavor.

Moral education involves the cultivation of the social spirit, a sense of value in the studies and activities of the school, the social interpretation of all the studies of the curriculum. It requires

adequate opportunity for the instincts and impulses of the individual to be so directed as to issue in habits of self-control and social service.

Dr. Dewey is not a mere theorist in this field. In his book *School and Society* will be found the practical methods by which in the experiment of the Elementary School at the University of Chicago he endeavored to work out his principles. The book presents the problem in which the modern school is involved by reason of the changes which make the complex society of today so difficult for the child to understand. Solution is to be found in attempting to understand first of all simpler social situations. How illuminating is the idea that all learning is advancement in social experience! When Dewey selects geography as central in education because of its richness in the development of the social imagination, some of us cannot forget the arid geography lesson when we had to depend upon sheer memory to tell whether cotton or olive oil was exported from Charleston.

The religious educator who is naturally called upon to give much attention to the teaching of the Bible will see at once what valuable material he has in hand from this point of view. In the simple pastoral life of the patriarchs, in the comparatively simple politics of the Hebrew state, in the elementary conditions of the Palestinian civilization, in the family and man-to-man morality with which Jesus dealt, it is possible to see the ethical principles of life more clearly than in our complex social order. Our business in biblical instruction is not so much to drag the past into the present as to cultivate a social imagina-

tion that will project the present into the past, enabling us to feel the quality of moral situations in that simpler time and thus appreciate the force of social obligation.

This book does not discuss the relation of the school to the church, but it is evident that in a community where education is being conducted in accordance with some of the larger insight which Dr. Dewey so conspicuously presents, the church will do well to study its task in the light of the school's endeavor. The growth of moral and religious values has been a part of that total growth of society which it is the business of education to make clear. The correlation of the instruction and activities of the church school and day school is one of the most vital problems now before us.

Every religious educator should have some clear conception of the meaning of kindergarten education. And this for the double reason that there should be a kindergarten in every church and that certain of the principles of Froebel are highly significant for religious education. As a matter of fact the kindergarten is generally misunderstood in the most absurd fashion. One minister recently, desirous of expressing emphatically the inefficiency of a mission Sunday school which had become nothing more than a place to take care of children on Sunday afternoon, stated that his church was using its money and strength for running a kindergarten. He meant, of course, a day nursery.

Nothing is easier than caricature. The "hard-headed" school trustee who regards every effort to socialize the curriculum as a mere addition of "fads and

frills" is the typical ignoramus ridiculing what he does not understand. It would be better to endeavor to appreciate a system of education devised by one of the world's great educational reformers who believed that the scientific study of the little child was worthy of the profoundest endeavors of scholarship. Superficially, the exercises of the kindergarten may seem the pleasing activities of the day nursery. Actually, they are the result of the most careful consideration of the psychological and physiological problems involved in the development of childhood.

The Kindergarten by Susan Blow, Patty Hill, and Elizabeth Harrison is in some sense a controversial book. For in this field, as in every other, there are the conservatives, who believe in preserving the great achievements of the past unchanged; the progressives, who think that each generation must interpret anew for itself the good of the old, daring to discriminate between the permanent and the incidental even in great teachings; and the moderates, who seek to concede something to the new thought but not too much. Inasmuch as these three reports were prepared with a view to standardizing the kindergarten program, it is evident that these educational leaders are nearer together in spirit than some conservatives and progressives in other spheres.

It will be noted that there are some differences in principle and some more marked differences in practice in these reports, but the presentation of the three views serves rather to make the whole system clear to the lay reader. The student of theology and of the psychology of religion will realize that we

are finding a more satisfactory thought of God and of religion in terms of cosmic and of social process than in terms of the Absolute, which the more rigid followers of Froebel still employ.

The great significance of the kindergarten appears at once in its very conception of education, although in our schools and in our churches we are still under the thrall of the conception of education in terms of knowledge. We think of the importance of arithmetic, grammar, spelling, geography, history, etc. Our children must know these thoroughly and as soon as possible. And we think of Bible, church doctrine, plan of salvation, denominational history, facts of missions, as of supreme importance. How shall a person be religious unless he knows these? But these are all means and not ends. The kindergarten thinks of man's fundamental relations to nature, to his fellow-men, and to God, and conceives of an ideal relationship which might exist in which one would be in complete understanding with his natural environment so that it would serve his needs, material and aesthetic, and be in social relationship with his fellow-men, sharing with them the richness of human life and all its inheritance, and be in harmony with God in whom is the good, the true, the beautiful.

And how shall all this come about? Manifestly, not by taking our most important adult possessions and seeking to simplify them for childish apprehension, not by memorizing formulae either of grammar or of theology. The kindergarten word is "self-activity." The process of education is not from knowledge to knowledge but from experience

to experience. Left entirely to himself the child would learn very much by this process. He is continuously self-active, prying, testing, experimenting, acquiring skill by repetition, securing control of himself and of his environment, entering into the larger experience of his elders through language. Education is the expert guidance of this natural process. To the superficial observer the child in the kindergarten seems to be forever engaged in trivial amusement, for we are still under the domination of the idea that sound education must, of necessity, be disagreeable. In reality the games, stories, conversations, songs, manual industry, constructions, exercises, pets, drawings, and dancing are specific endeavors to direct the self-activity of the child in the best and most natural development for self-realization and social efficiency. He is finding himself and finding his relation to the world and to the social order, past, present, and future, of which he is a part and in which he is to be a contributing factor.

Froebel had intended to develop a complete system of education but the great demands and opportunities of childhood prevented him from carrying his ideas beyond that sphere. He would have devised a system in which self-activity should be supreme. He was, of course, dominated by a religious ideal, conceiving of religion in large and inclusive terms. The religious educator may find in the kindergarten fundamental principles that he needs. For what is religious education but a progressive socialization, helping the immature personality to be at home in his world with nature, with man, and with God?

The Montessori Method is the book

in which Dr. Maria Montessori has presented to American readers her interesting system of education. This book has been enthusiastically heralded by some as destined to revolutionize all education, and of course, by others, has been the subject of the easy ridicule to which anything new is exposed. Soberly considered, the methods and experiments of Dr. Montessori deserve our careful consideration and promise to make some valuable contributions to our educational theory and practice.

The book is well worth reading for its fascinating account of the formation of the "children's houses," a notable and wise philanthropic endeavor in connection with the model tenements in Rome. And it is important to keep in mind this peculiar social environment in estimating the possibility of any transfer of the Montessori procedure.

The fundamental principle of this system goes to the heart of child-training whether at home or at school. It is the principle of liberty. The teacher is largely an observer, at most a director. The child educates himself with carefully devised didactic material which, for the most part, enables him to discover and rectify his own errors, and which is so natural an opportunity for his activities that he spontaneously desires to work with it.

Madame Montessori uses the word "work" while the kindergarten often speaks of play. There is no fundamental difference between these. Phillips Brooks expressed that splendid sense of the joy of doing a significant work for which one is well fitted when he said, "It is fun to be a minister." It is the dull monotony of modern industry that

has made the harsh distinction between work and play. Nothing can be more erroneous than the common notion that children are lazy. They are always at work. Montessori points out the grave wrong that we do children in serving them instead of allowing them to serve themselves. Most suggestively she remarks that much of the ill temper and rebelliousness of children comes from their being frustrated in their natural efforts to do things by meddling parents or teachers who are forever making their activities impossible. She would teach children to wash themselves, dress themselves, keep the room in order, take out their own materials and put them back, serve one another in common meals; and she finds them delighting to be useful. Of course it is easier to do things for children than to let them laboriously learn to do them for themselves. And this fact explains very much of the failure of home training.

The Montessori method has been misunderstood in the supposition that the principle of liberty means that the child may do as he pleases. He may do everything good that he pleases but nothing wrong. He may not interfere with others, annoy them, act rudely. If he does he is regarded as needing special attention. He is removed from the group, isolated, given toys to play with, but not permitted to be a member of the working body. He soon desires to return and find his place. Everything active, constructive, experimental, investigative is good, and he may do as he will and go from one thing to another as he will, indoors or out. The important endeavor is made that he shall not associate immobility with goodness and

activity with evil. Discipline through liberty, inhibition of undesirable activities by the large opportunity for good activities—these are the principles employed. Of course the teacher is constantly present to stimulate the child by introducing him to significant activities. There are some great practical difficulties here, but the general principles involved are sound.

The discussion of will is very significant for religious education. Montessori puts little emphasis on obedience, which is supposed to be a golden virtue of childhood, and this for the simple reason that she regards obedience as a later development of which young children are incapable. Will is, of course, self-directed activity, and therefore will-power can be developed only through the process of activity. That the child often cannot obey is a simple psychological fact.

We need not discuss her theory that the religious sentiment is a native instinct that is to be encouraged. It is enough to agree most heartily that the performance of religious acts is a natural social participation of the child in the experiences of its elders and is of great educational value.

It would be interesting to consider in detail the materials for the education of sense and particularly the method of teaching children of four years to write, which Montessori regards as perfectly natural. But this review need not be extended, for the admirable introduction to the book by Professor H. W. Holmes is a most discriminating estimate of the Montessori system as regards its value for American education, and also a comparison with the American kinder-

garten system with some suggestions as to a possible combination. It is noteworthy that Miss Hill in her kindergarten report, which we have already discussed, advocates some use of the Montessori material.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. To what extent is the American school a real democracy?
2. Is the Bible a literature of social experience? If so, what does this imply as to its religious value?
3. Would it be desirable for the church to have a school for three hours on Sunday morning with significant activities related to the social needs of the children?
4. A certain child stated that he liked the day kindergarten but not the Sunday kindergarten. Is there anything in the kindergarten that is not suitable for Sunday?

5. Is there any danger of the progressive kindergarten losing something of the religious quality which Froebel considered so important?

6. What could be done in our tenements for establishing "children's houses," in which the life of the children would be directed eight or nine hours a day?

7. What points in the Montessori system seem to be suggestive for American children?

SOME FURTHER WORKS

John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum*.

Irving King, *Social Aspects of Education*.

Perry, *Wider Use of the School Plant*.

Griggs, *Moral Education*.

M. V. O'Shea, *Social Development and Education*.

Friedrich Froebel, *Education of Man*.

Bowen, *Froebel and Education through Self-Activity*.

Foster, *The Kindergarten in the Church*.

SUGGESTIONS TO LEADERS OF CLASSES USING THE ORIGIN AND TEACHING OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

In presenting the work of the current month the leader will find a wonderful opportunity to emphasize the essential principle which lies back of the entire course of study which the class has pursued, viz., the historical conditions out of which any individual book arose, and the color given to the book because of current thought at the time of its origin. A lifetime of study is necessary to get the fullest appreciation of this principle as illustrated in the Gospel of John, but the most artificial student of this course cannot fail to catch something of the principle and to find his sense of the personality back of the book enhancing its living interest and value to him.

It happens that two interesting poems from the pen of Robert Browning are asso-

ciated with this book—"Karshish, the Arab Physician," which gives a most interesting conception of the attitude of a contemporary physician toward the story of the raising of Lazarus, and "The Death in the Desert," which is the result of the poet's meditation upon the last hours of John the disciple. We consider that a review of these poems in this connection would add still further interest to the study of John's Gospel.

We also suggest that a good deal of time be spent in the latter part of the month on the discussion of the value of the historical study of the Bible. Members of the group should be pushed to the point of expressing themselves as to what it really means, and what it has contributed to their own appre-